

Essay

How Will We Write? A Report from the National College Media Convention

Author(s):

Jeff Jeske

[1]

Publication History:

The Writing Instructor, January 2004

If you think all this just can't change a whole history of language and literature, think again.

—Constance Hale, *Wired Style*

The only question is, when will it arrive?

I refer to the avalanche thundering toward us, an avalanche that has already struck media writing.

It is the avalanche precipitated by the Internet, streaming media, and new generations of reader/writers whose consciousness is being progressively reshaped by the digital revolution and its promise of infinite speed and multimodal discourse (see Kress and Van Leeuwen). We can see the results in the current splintering, diminishing, and reshaping of journalistic prose.

We are witnessing a harbinger of inevitable changes in the writing classroom and especially the traditional expository writing taught there,[1] [2] changes that the composition literature of the last 20 years has anticipated (see, for example, Hawisher and LeBlanc; Hawisher and Selfe), and, more recently, monitored. These are changes about which we must become cognizant and for which we must now prepare.

Background/Personal Narrative

For well over a decade I have served as writing director at a liberal arts college. During that same period I have also been the faculty adviser for the campus newspaper. For nearly this entire span, I experienced the two fields of activity as parallel but separate. Nearly every March I attended the 4Cs and in October I attended the National College Media Convention, a gathering of college and professional journalists. Generally I found little at the media convention to inform my composition teaching and vice versa.

But two years ago that changed. Because our college's print newspaper was about to add an online version, I spent my time at that October's National College Media

Convention in Washington, D.C., attending sessions devoted to online journalism. The presenters were a mix of professional online editors, news directors, and college journalism professors. Their message, delivered with an urgency bred by breaking developments, was simple and clear: the role of print prose to communicate information is being radically reduced.

As a writing director I soon felt a different urgency, which framed itself in this question: If the online standard for expository media writing subordinates print to the visual image, audio, and video, why would we not expect the same pressure to be brought on academic expository writing to incorporate these same powerful accessories—accessories now available to students as college writing moves progressively online—with similar results?

This question sent me to the literature to learn more about how composition studies has dealt with the rise of the computer.[2] [3] Meanwhile, where media writing is concerned, this past year's National College Media Convention, held in New Orleans, told much the same story that the previous year's had.

What's Happening to Journalistic Prose?

Journalism is moving online rapidly.[3] [4] And just as the site of journalism is changing, so is the nature of the more future-oriented journalism now increasingly being practiced there. "As an online journalist," said Mike Dorsher, a 2001 conference presenter who had helped to found *The Washington Post's* Web site, "you don't just put the news into words." [4] [5] Whereas in an earlier online stage, newspapers merely "repurposed" content from their print versions, preserving the print stories in their entirety, what goes online now is being repackaged in a way that transforms it utterly.

Chiefly, thanks to the development of broadband transmission, we are now witnessing the phenomenon of "convergent media," in simplest terms the mixing of traditional print with audio and video elements. The news screen of the future (and increasingly the present) offers streaming video feed in the screen's dominant box with accompanying audio options. [5] [6] Other boxes on the screen contain links to more audio and video material, either to support the main story or to provide avenues to media-enhanced secondary stories. Traditional prose appears in the form of "teasers" (brief paragraphs that offer jumps to other screens where print stories can be accessed) and bits of meta-discourse that help the viewer navigate the audio and video elements.

In a presentation on online media at the 2001 National College Media Convention, Steven E. Chappell, communications professor at Truman State University, aptly noted "You need to start thinking outside of the box when you produce for the Web." Stories from a newspaper's print edition are not Web-ready, he observed. Readers want their on-line news condensed and quick. They do not want to have to scroll down a full screen more than once. They do want links in each story enabling the reader to connect with either the reporter or editor. And they expect that the Web site will be updated regularly. Online prose is not only concise, but molten and evanescent.

Since the 1980's, print journalism has become more visual (Vogel 110). Print has increasingly had to compete for space with the photographic image, an image that is about to become three-dimensional.[6] [7] And in the online environment, it is not only the static photograph but the moving video image as well, both easily spliced into prose text or substituted for such text altogether. In a 2001 convention session on converging media, Yvonne Daley, veteran of the *Boston Globe*, *People*, and *Time*, advised student journalists that an online story should not have "an inordinate amount" of copy on any

page—it should be broken down into manageable chunks with lots of extra photos. “If you have good enough pictures on-line,” Daley said, “you don’t need a story.”[7] [8]

Meanwhile, in writing about the impact of television on journalism, Melvin Lasky notes how print journalists have tried to cope with the shrinking attention span of their readers by adopting a more visual dynamic: “print journalism tries to vie with the enviable techniques of pictorial reportage by imitating, in some manner, the film story’s capacity for quick cutting and fade-outs, for montage, and close-ups, and all the rest. Even the structure of a news dispatch is shaped, bent and twisted so as to capture attention and stimulate instant interest ” (113). But what if journalistic prose must indeed now vie directly with the visual media on the computer screen? What can be more visual than film feed itself?

In the midst of the current shift from a print to an electronic culture, not only is prose’s role diminishing, but its quality is declining. In a recent letter to the editor in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, reader Elaine Tierney comments on a diminishing appreciation for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. She notes, “Unfortunately this situation is just a symptom of a much larger problem. ‘Give me the news but give it to me quickly,’ the audience seems to be saying. They’re now satisfied with fast clips and sound bites, or in the case of print, headlines, photo captions, and short stories. There is no love for the written word anymore. The finely crafted sentence has become a lost art ” (5).

Tierney’s concern is well placed. Long-time journalists confirm a general decline in the quality of journalistic writing, partly due to television’s (and computer games’) emphasis on vividness and speed and entertainment, partly on the Internet’s unrelenting de-emphasis of traditional prose text (Moritz). [8] [9] Is there any reason for optimism when we consider Leonard Vogel’s prediction that by 2006, journalistic content will chiefly be distributed not by traditional print media but by interactive television, home PC’s, and notebook computers (11)? Meanwhile, even print newspapers are undergoing makeovers that, in a metaphorically scary way, involve reducing their amount of newsprint.[9] [10]

At the same time, new multimedia authoring tools that make it much easier to integrate video and audio into online document packages are making their way to the desktop. Partly in response, graduate programs in journalism are reshaping their curricula so as to integrate new media in every course (Pavlik 206).[10] [11] And undergraduate journalism students are being trained at the National College Media Convention to make the transition in sessions featuring titles like “Tech Tools for Professional Video Production” (“non-linear editing, special effects and Digital Video Disk production”) and “We Wanna Stream.”

The New Composition Student

As our college’s information technology director pointed out to the faculty in a fall-semester memo, 70 percent of our first-year students came to their first orientation check-in with computers in hand and wanting to be connected to the Internet as soon as possible.

These students, headed for the first-year composition classroom, are the students described in a landmark article entitled “The Information-Age Mindset: Changes in Students and Implications for Higher Education.” In the article, Jason Frand, director of computing and information services at UCLA, charts the changes in outlook and even consciousness that make it likely that writing students will not only find congenial the changes currently occurring in journalism but will progressively come to expect them in

composition as well.

Among the traits Frand discusses are the following:

- Constant connectivity. For these students, Frand argues, continual staying in touch with the Web is a high priority. What this likely means is that the mode and style of communication that the students find there will likely become normative.
- A zest for experimentation. These students are most comfortable with the “persistent trial-and-error” logic of Nintendo. The traditional approaches to problem solving inherent in traditional linear prose structures may come to seem foreign and tediously slow.
- Blurring of creator and consumer. We may need to reconsider current notions of authorship in light of current Web protocols that facilitate a sharing/borrowing/taking of others' intellectual property (22). Reconsidering authorship invites a reinterpretation of the rhetorical triangle and the traditional arrangement patterns in which it finds expression.
- Zero tolerance for delays. Our students' desire for immediacy privileges less formal—and more economical—communication styles.
- Multi-tasking. Our students are used to and appear to thrive in the multimedia simultaneity that modern data-providers offer. They not only operate in a world that blends audio, visual media, and print, but maneuver quickly and constantly among them.

A trait that Frand does not discuss is one that Internet developers have described in the computer-using population generally, namely an impatience at having to read. As one researcher notes, people looking for information on the Internet are “basically scanning. There's very little actual comprehension that's going on” (Weeks). He adds that Internet users prefer their information in small pieces, preferably bulleted, not in traditional block paragraphs. Information-providers and marketers have responded by substituting symbols, colors, shapes, and pictures for words where possible.

Does the computer atrophy the skills required for reading and enjoying books and other traditional modes of expository writing? Are the students who come to us for instruction in composition increasingly part of the new population of “aliterates”—people who can read but prefer not to? Tellingly, the *2002 Writer's Market* contains the first requests from listed literary agents that authors submit shorter manuscripts.

In a conclusion that assesses the implications of his findings for higher education, Frand proposes that “the challenge will be for educators and higher education institutions to incorporate the information-age mindset of today's learners into our programs” (24). Pedagogy must change fundamentally, he argues. Until it does, “we will not realize the full value of the computer, communication, and information technology investments that we are making today.” I would argue that to the extent that we *do* transform the educational experience “so that it is meaningful to the information-age learner,” we ensure that the way in which writing is performed will change equally as fundamentally, as is already occurring in journalism.

What Will happen to Expository Writing?

As the new generations of composition students arrive at our campuses, seeking their immediate Internet hook-ups, what will they find? Certainly networks more friendly to audio and video. Windows XP, Microsoft's new operating system has made enormous strides in handling music, video, and digital photography: This is a system that integrates its own media-streaming programs. Microsoft expects to extend its XP franchise into the

areas of cable boxes and handheld devices, meaning that the new media-heavy system will become universal in our students' electronic lives.

Meanwhile colleges and universities are embracing the new electronic technologies to their core. Diane Harley, at the Center for Studies in Higher Education at the University of California at Berkeley, in acknowledging that "the explosion of the Internet and associated technologies in the latter half of the 1990s has made combining production and delivery technologies with interactive communication technologies relatively simple" (10), cites the wide extent of the new hardware and software available for use in education, which include not simply wireless communications and teleconferencing but digital library and N-way video streaming. Streaming media offer particular benefits in that they encourage anywhere/anytime access. Plamen Miltenoff, in describing how St. Cloud University is integrating streaming media throughout its program, explains how doing so, among other benefits, eliminates the need for expensive music and language labs as well as the cumbersome hardware of the college's traditional Media Services department (59).

Sharon Gray, in "Multimedia Across the Disciplines," salutes the ways that the new high-quality digital visuals and audio invite user involvement and improve traditional pedagogy. Heretofore, "the predominant mode of knowledge transfer has been the written and spoken word . . . *words, however, are the most abstract means of communication*" (24; my emphasis). Now, the goal may well be to "immerse the student in a multiple sensory environment in order to transfer and infuse knowledge." Doing so will speak to all learning modalities (e.g., the auditory, tactile, and visual) and not privilege those students who learn best via the printed word.

The pressure is now on faculty to use the new technology and to therefore realize these benefits as well as, incidentally, help their institutions recoup their investments. A new vision is emerging. David Brown, dean of the International Center for Computer Enhanced Learning, describes in "The Teaching Profession in 2020" how "technology-the-enabler" is vastly expanding our capacities and actually enabling us, in the midst of an emerging teaching environment "based on customization, collaboration, and interaction," to return to the one-on-one master/apprentice era of Plato and Aristotle. Among his recommendations: "Present the most important material in several modes (audio, visual, text)" (21).

My point? I must assume that as the multimedia mode becomes the standard in our students' connected and increasingly paper-free lives, as well as the way in which their teachers model effective multi-modal communication of material, the expository essay will, as it inevitably moves online, integrate multimedia and become transformed in the process, just as is happening with online journalistic prose. As Jay David Bolter notes, "the defining quality of the electronic medium is its ability to interweave words, pictures, video images—any material that can be represented as bits" (99). The pressure to achieve this entelechy will only grow as multimedia authoring tools become easier to use and the multimedia presence becomes increasingly prevalent in our students' environment, cultivating a style of reading that is itself multimedia-based and multidimensional.

The infrastructure to support the change is already being layered into our books. I see that the recently released second edition of Andrea Lunsford's *Easy Writer*, which serves as our college's mass-adoption writing handbook, features a new section on multimedia presentations and includes information on how to secure permissions for using non-print materials. It also moves closer to the front of the book its now-revised chapter on online writing.

In section 2C, “Document Design,” Lunsford observes, “Images often speak more loudly than words. Fortunately, today’s computer technology gives writers the ability to incorporate images into written texts” (14). Among her bulleted recommendations to the student: “Begin planning the visual aspects of your text as soon as you start planning the text itself” and “Create a visual layout for your entire text in order to get the ‘big picture’”(14). All well and good. A concern arises, though, when I consider Lester Faigley’s comment in another new handbook, “Language and visual design work in fundamentally different ways” (67). Does the visual involve, for example, a different structural dynamic, as Lev Manovich proposes in *The Language of New Media*, a study of the parallels between new media and cinema? Gunther Kress contrasts the “temporo-sequential logic” of written language and the “spatial-simultaneous logic” of the visual, asking, “If language and image do not merely co-exist, but interact, what are the consequences?” (78). Traditional print structures may have to give way and we should acknowledge that up front.[11] [12]

In a later section on Web texts, also new to the second edition, Lunsford advises “Ask yourself what combination of content, images, site organization, and tone will best help you to achieve your purpose, and consider any technical limitations that your readers may face (Will they be able to quickly download large graphics or sound files, for example?) ” (16). Aside from the parenthetical assumption of the use of media elements, what intrigues me are the implications of “your purpose.” Lunsford has begun this section—2d Web texts—with the statement, “As more and more people go to school, work, play and shop online, more and more writers are learning to compose effective Web texts (16).” In other words, going to school is, electronically speaking, another piece of a seamless life, a life in which the communication style of composition students will likely become indistinguishable from that of the online communication style toward which journalism—one other piece of the seamless life—is evolving. The main title of *Easy Writer’s* section 2 is “Composing and Designing Online.” A new world beckons.

Up to now I have emphasized the role that convergent media are beginning to play in the writing classroom, a role that for me personally began with students submitting print papers that included visual images and making Power Point presentations that utilize sound and video clips. It has progressed to their requesting that they be able to submit their papers online rather than in print so that they can incorporate the same non-print elements.

I accept as a given that the prose essay’s structural dynamic *will* shift accordingly, in ways that I cannot now foresee because I do not have expertise in these media and *their* structural dynamic. I do remember Stephen Bernhardt’s important 1986 essay, “Seeing the Text,” which anticipated current developments in arguing for a more visual approach to the structure of prose documents. Bernhardt contrasts conventional essay format with a more visually informative format that uses spacing, type size, indenting, headings, bullets, and other graphic devices to enable the reader to process the text non-linearly, the same format recommended currently by *The Columbia Guide to Online Style* (107). In advocating a more visual design—and declaring that in the face of the electronic media, classroom practice privileging the more conventional essay format “can only become increasingly irrelevant” (77)—Bernhardt acknowledges that the mode of coherence shifts dramatically from the traditional essay’s subtle structural pattern to the blunt iconic coherence of the on-line visual expository package. But Bernhardt argues that the gains inherent in exploiting written language’s graphic potential more than offset the losses.

What transformations in expository essay writing can we anticipate? Besides a shift in how coherence is achieved, we might expect the following developments, all implicit in the force-lines governing online writing and now visible in online journalism. In charting

these, I am indebted to Andrew Bonime and Ken C. Pohlmann's *Writing for New Media: The Essential Guide to Writing for Interactive Media, CD-ROMs, and the Web*, one of the first texts to address online writing fully and directly.

- *Non-linear structure.* It is true that the Web depends upon cleanly organized hierarchies of information. These enable what Bonime and Pohlmann call "drilling down into the information structure" (21). But in most other respects, the structure of online exposition contrasts sharply with the traditional expository essay's linearity. Hypertext links enable—nay, encourage—the reader to chart her or his own path through the subject. The writer no longer needs to observe a chronological sequence with background material coming first, because background, present, and future exist in linked simultaneity. What used to be the meat of print body paragraphs can be conveniently exported in the online "essay" to linked sidebars that the reader may or may not pursue or to other texts that the writer has not authored. Certainly the writer cannot assume the dependency of one (brief) information chunk on another. Bolter suggests that "essays are hierarchical in organization but linear in presentation" (112). At what point does a text whose presentation is not linear cease to be an essay? (See Julie Erickson and Richard Lehrer for a glimpse of current assimilation of associative rhetoric in pedagogy and Alysson Troffer for a primer on how to make the transition from linear writing to hypertext.)
- *Radical concision, with a reduced role for prose.* Three key principles in *Writing for New Media*: "Think multimedia" (134), "Write concisely," and "Write less" (182).
- *Emergence of new syntactic preferences, both micro and macro.* Cecelia Friend's *Contemporary Editing* advises journalists that introductory phrases "can complicate sentences and delay sentences needlessly" (185). Given the stylistic forces driving Web prose toward clarity and economy, the introductory phrase is one example of a vulnerable micro item. Meanwhile at the macro level, Bonime and Pohlmann propose that online writers faced with convergent media and interactivity will essentially need to develop a new system of syntax and grammar that is unique to the genre (3).
- *Informal style.* A hallmark of the Web, a result both of the immediacy and perishability of e-mail and the speed of the online experience. Among other recommendations, *Wired Style*, an online style guide developed by the editors of *Wired* magazine, calls for the elimination of formal titles and the use of first names (99).
- *Relaxed editing practices.* A consequence of the Web's informality, declining attention to proofreading and rewriting has become a widespread phenomenon, according to some critics.^[12]^[13] Is there any reason to suppose that "formal" online writing genres will not suffer?
- *Changes in sentence-level typology.* We no longer use underlining online for its traditional purposes because underlining has been appropriated to indicate hyperlinks. Abroad, academies for the preservation of language have their hands full trying to preserve the online existence of diacritical marks like the tilde. At home, we are witnessing the emergence of a host of new abbreviations, symbols and acronyms.^[13]^[14] Meanwhile, we can expect the whole apparatus of traditional in-text documentation to change as hyperlinking increases.¹⁴^[15]

Conclusion

I leave it to others to determine the potential effects on expository writing of changing notions of authorship and the decentered self that the online environment hypothetically promotes. I also have not taken up the issue of the online environment's interactivity, which promises to take online prose to an even higher level of non-linearity. I merely

note that these important issues are related, inasmuch as one of the expository communicator's goals in the interactive environment is to enable the reader/viewer to author his or her own process of discovery.

In their introduction to *Writing for New Media*, Bonime and Pohlmann address one segment of their audience with the observation, "If you are a student or teacher of composition or writing skills, you may have considered that interactive media require a writing skill that is as specialized as writing for theater or film" (1).

The premise of my report from the National College Media Convention is that journalists are now discovering the magnitude of the implications of that statement and that we in composition studies are likely to be next; our literature is studying intently the individual components of the change (see George, for example) but we may not have braced ourselves adequately for the holistic enormity of what is now underway.

Convergent media on the one hand and the social realities of Internet communication on the other are turning online journalism into a mode radically different from its traditional print counterpart. No one consciously planned this transformation. The conference presenters, some of them decision-makers with online newspapers, seem surprised—even chagrined—at prose's diminishment in the uneven competition with streaming audio and video. But the transformation is happening nevertheless.

The same forces that have overwhelmed print journalism are operating in the college and university environment, although only embryonically at this point. The same audience that increasingly prefers journalistic audio and video feed to print is populating our classrooms. Also increasingly populating our classrooms, thanks to the commitment of college administrators eager to join the technological mainstream, are the tools to reproduce the same phenomena. Granted, the professoriate lags behind, but we will get there yet.^[15] ^[16]

Convergent media are beginning to play a role in the classroom and in student composing as well. Images are available to be spliced into prose texts. And thanks to increasing bandwidths, audio and video feed are available too. It is inconceivable to me that expository writing will not incorporate the latter, just as it is inconceivable to me that the combination of the new student and the realities of online communication will not affect traditional classroom exposition as well.

Are we prepared to accept a reduced role for prose? Are we ready to begin accepting student use of non-print materials without attending to how the respective dynamics of video and audio will affect prose's structure and style? Are we content to allow others to write the defining online style texts? Are we satisfied to be reactive in all of this rather than proactive?

Granted, the dawning of the new offers much excitement, an excitement found both in composition studies and in online journalism, where, critics believe, new technologies provide opportunities for the practice of a *better* journalism. New rules and models are being minted daily. The editors of the *Columbia Guide to Online Style* note that producers of online academic texts "frequently approach such work as prototypic and experimental; they often consciously try to break with academic conventions and disrupt traditional notions of textuality" (3).^[16] ^[17] It's an extravagantly wide-open frontier.

But I wonder, how will we write?

—Jeff Jeske

Notes

[1] [18] I focus here on writing intended to inform and explain, writing often denoted by the term “article” (in contrast to the customarily used “essay,” with that term’s more belletristic connotation). This writing, with its foundation in disciplined analysis and core virtues of clarity, concreteness and correctness, continues along with persuasive writing to be the coin of the realm in academic, professional, and media contexts, as exemplified both in print and in serious, high-quality online venues. Students will continue to be expected to engage in other forms of writing while in college, but for the foreseeable future, none will prepare them better than clear exposition for the realities of work-life writing that matters.

Thus I find myself disagreeing with Alice L. Trupe, who argues in her recent article entitled “Academic Literacy in a Wired World: Redefining Genres for College Writing Courses” that the freshman essay and the research paper, both staples of the writing classroom, offer “little value as a genre outside of educational institution” and should be de-emphasized in the first-year portfolio in favor of Internet-based occasional writing (e.g., e-mail texts, MOO session chunks, listserv posts), writing in which as Trupe acknowledges, the core virtues mentioned above become eroded. I do agree with Trupe that because of the Internet, “conciseness” will become an increasingly important marker of good exposition. Her sample portfolio offers promising examples of short expository exercises. Nevertheless, to prepare students for the rhetoric of professional writing situations, I prefer greater focus on assignments emphasizing precision, revision, and disciplined research—qualities that characterize Trupe’s article.

[2] [19] I learned that the interface has been well covered. According to Lisa Gerrard, a pioneer in the use of computers in writing instruction at UCLA in the early 80’s, that interface began in practice in the late 70’s, with significant literature beginning soon after (see her preface to Gail E. Hawisher et al.’s early history of computers and writing, *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education 1979-1984: A History*).

Since November, 1983, the journal *Computers and Composition* has defined the relationship between computers and composition studies and helped create and maintain a community of interested teachers and scholars. Meanwhile the annual *CCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric* covered the field in its “Computer and Literacy Studies” section from 1984 until 1999 (these archives can be accessed online at <http://www.ibiblio.org/twtaylor/> [20]). Since 1999, this index has been subsumed in the *MLA International Bibliography*.

Relevant journals besides *Computers and Composition* include *College Composition and Communication*, *Computers and the Humanities*, *Currents in Electronic Literacy*, *Ejournal Index*, *Kairos*, *Interpersonal Computing and Technology*, *Journal of Advanced Composition*, *Journal of Electronic Publishing*, *The Writing Instructor*, *Mind Culture and Activity*, *PreText*, and *WPA: Writing Program Administration*.

[3] [21] Leonard Mogel illustrates the rate of change by noting that whereas by 1993 only 20 newspapers had gone online, that number grew to 500 in 1995 and more than doubled by 1996. By 1999, the number had spiked to 6800 worldwide. Now, nearly all newspapers are either in the process of adding an online site or thinking about it.

[4] [22] I am indebted to students Alison Goss, Joanna Shunk, James Tatum, and Katy Wurster for helping me to cover sessions at the National College Media Convention.

[5] [23] In the past, Internet users would have spent an impractical amount of time

downloading large multimedia files. Now, with streaming video, a file request goes to a streaming server. Plamen Miltenoff describes what happens next: “The streaming server initiates sending the beginning of the streaming file back to the user’s workstation. At this point, the user’s ‘player’ software opens, receives the first part of the media file, and stores it in the workstation’s memory. The software ‘plays’ the first part of the file—it collects the data and sends it as a steady stream to the application that is processing the data and converting it to sound or pictures—while it simultaneously receives the rest of the file and discards the data that has been already viewed, providing a continuous flow of media” (59).

[6] [24] In *Journalism and New Media*, John Pavlik discusses the journalistic uses to which the new omni-directional camera, which can reproduce a 360-degree field of vision, are about to be put (6-13).

[7] [25] I have been told the same by Adam Lucas, former publisher of *Basketball America*, a national print monthly that also fields an online version. Interestingly, in 2001, the *Best Newspaper Writing* series added a photojournalism section to one of its annuals for the first time in its history.

[8] [26] John Pavlik observes that “today’s journalist must write both faster *and* better. The problem is that few journalists have time for thoughtful analysis before they issue their reports” (22).

[9] [27] Thus in announcing last year’s makeover of my local paper, editor John Robinson proclaimed that the *News & Record* was joining hundreds of other newspapers, including the *Los Angeles Times*, in adopting a new, slimmer format that “helps us reduce the amount of newsprint we use.” Robinson continued, “Our challenge is to write concisely. As all English teachers know and most writers acknowledge, tighter writing is better writing” (A1).

[10] [28] The reward for making the transition from print to the online, multimedia world is sizeable. Starting salaries for graduates of the Columbia graduate school of journalism with a concentration in new media averaged \$40,000 in 2000—almost double what their print counterparts received (Pavlik 215).

[11] [29] See, in this connection, Diana George’s recent call in *CCC* for greater attention to the teaching of visual literacy in the classroom. See Kathleen L. Welch also, who connects video with the associative logic of hypertext.

[12] [30] Christina Haas cites early studies showing that writers proofread less effectively online than they do when reviewing hard copy. She also acknowledges the dangers inherent in relying on a computers spell- and grammar-check programs.

Ironically, as newsman Leonard Mogel points out, copy-editing positions are less common online than they are in print journalism (185). Editors say that new journalist recruits can’t write well, even if they are more technologically savvy. This is likely to exacerbate “the appalling casualness of the current use of language [. . .] deficiencies in grammar and vocabulary, ignorance of shades of meaning, indifference to traditional and/or reasonable rules of proper usage”(3) that Melvin Lasky indicts in *The Language of Journalism*.

Addressing the “new fluency” of online writing, former journalist William Zinsser suggests in the latest edition of his classic *On Writing Well*, “Nobody told all the new e-mail writers that the essence of writing is rewriting. Just because they are writing with ease and enjoyment doesn’t mean they are writing well” (x).

[13] [31] See, for example, Amy Harmon's "Internet Changes Language for : -) and : - (." Meanwhile, *Wired Style* proposes ratification of the "Save a keystroke" principle and predicts the elimination of initial capital letters and hyphens (regarding the latter, another principle: "When in doubt, close it up") (84).

[14] [32] Cf. *Columbia Guide to Online Style*: "If both a bibliography and a cited work are located on the World Wide Web, for example, then why not make the reference a hypertextual link to the cited work itself instead of merely listing the title in the bibliography?" (108).

[15] [33] Steven W. Gilbert, former director of the American Association for Higher Education's technology project, has established current "embarrassment level" standards for a mainstream university professor's minimum technology competencies. As basic as they are, they include access to greater bandwidth than telephone modems provide (multimedia), the ability to post course syllabus and readings on the Web, and the practice of checking e-mail daily.

An interesting side-note: whereas overhead projectors were readily available at the 2000 4 C's conference, presenters had to make their own arrangements for PowerPoint.

[16] [34] *Wired Style* declares, "We don't shrink from experimentation. We're happy to push the boundaries of language and form" (2), and advises the writer to "Welcome inconsistency [. . .] play with grammar and syntax. Appreciate unruliness" (96). Or as one of the chapter titles has it, "Screw the Rules."

Works Cited

Bernhardt, Stephen A. "Seeing the Text." *College Composition and Communication* 37.1 (1986): 66-78.

Bolter, Jay David. *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1991.

Bonime, Andrew, and Ken C. Pohlmann. *Writing for New Media: The Essential Guide to Writing for Interactive Media, CD-ROMs, and the Web*. New York: Wiley, 1998.

Brown, David G. "The Teaching Profession in 2020." *Syllabus* 14.9 (2001): 21.

Chappell, Steve. "Web Publishing: The Basics." National College Media Convention. New Orleans. 25 Oct. 2001.

Daley, Yvonne. "Preparing Students for the Converging Media." National College Media Convention. New Orleans. 26 Oct. 2001.

Dorsher, Mike. "Online Journalism: Have You Got What it Takes?" National College Media Convention. New Orleans. 27 Oct. 2001.

Erickson, Julie and Richard Lehrer. "What's in a Link? Student Conceptions of the Rhetoric of Association in Hypermedia Composition." *Computers as Cognitive Tools, Vol. 2. No More Walls: Theory Change, Paradigm Shifts, and Their Influence on the Use of Computers for Instructional Purposes*. Ed. Susanne P. Lajoie. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000.

Faigley, Lester. *The Longman Guide to the Web*. New York: Longman, 2000.

- Frand, Jason L. "The Information-Age Mindset: Changes in Students and Implications for Higher Education." *Educause* Sept./Oct. (2000): 15-24.
- Friend, Cecelia, Don Challenger and Katherine E. McAdams. *Contemporary Editing*. Chicago: NTC, 1999.
- George, Diana. "From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing." *College Composition and Communication* 54.1 (2002), 11-39.
- Gilbert, Steven W. "Achieving the Embarrassment Level." *Syllabus* 15.6 (2002): 24-5.
- Gray, Sharon. "Multimedia Across the Disciplines." *Syllabus* 13.9 (2000): 14-18, 61.
- Hale, Constance, ed. *Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age*. San Francisco: HardWired, 1996.
- Harley, Diane. "Higher Education in the Digital Age: Planning for an Uncertain Future." *Syllabus* 15.2 (2001): 10-12.
- Harmon, Amy. "Internet Changes Language for :-) & :-(." *Exploring Language*. 9th ed. Ed. Gary Goshgarian. New York: Longman, 2000. 139-42.
- Haas, Christina. "'Seeing it on the Screen Isn't Really Seeing it': Computer Writers' Reading Problems." Gayle E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, eds. *Critical Perspectives on Computers and Composition Instruction*. New York: Teacher's College, 1989.16-29.
- Hawisher, Gayle E. and Paul LeBlanc, eds. *Re-Imagining Computers and Composition: Teaching and Research in the Virtual Age*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1992.
- Hawisher, Gayle E., Paul LeBlanc, Charles Moran, and Cynthia L. Selfe. *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education 1979-1984: A History*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1996.
- Hawisher, Gayle E. and Cynthia L. Selfe, eds. *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies*. Logan, Utah: Utah UP, 1999.
- Kress, Gunther. "'English at the Crossroads': Rethinking Curricula of Communication in the Context of the turn to the Visual." Gayle E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe, eds. *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies*. Logan, Utah: Utah UP, 1999. 66-88.
- Kress, Gunther and Theo Van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold, 2001.
- Lasky, Melvin. *The Language of Journalism*. Vol. 1. New Brunswick, New Jersey:Transaction, 2000.
- Lucas, Adam. Personal interview. 18 Oct. 2001.
- Lunsford, Andrea. *Easy Writer: A Pocket Manual*. 2nd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2002.
- Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001.

Miltenoff, Plamen. "Integrating Streaming Media into Web-Based Learning: A Modular Approach." *Syllabus* 14.1 (2000): 58-61.

Mogel, Leonard. *The Newspaper: Everything You Need to Know to Make It in the Newspaper Business*. Pittsburgh: GATF, 2000.

Moritz, Frederic A. "How American Journalism Has Changed." E-mail to Jeff Jeske. 4 Sept. 2001.

Pavlik, John V. *Journalism and New Media*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001.

Robinson, John. "The Same Quality, a Better Package." *News & Record* 3 April 2001:A1+.

Tierney, Elaine. Letter. *Columbia Journalism Review* (July/August 2001): 5.

Troffer, Alysso. "Writing Effectively Online: How to Compose Hypertext." *Computers and Composition*. 2000. <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/> [35]. (14 October 2002). [Also <http://homepage.mac.com/alysson/httoc.html> [36]]

Trupe, Alice L. "Academic Literacy in a Wired World: Redefining Genres for College Writing Courses." *Kairos*. 7.2 Summer 2002. <http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/7.2/binder.html?sectionone/trupe/WiredWorld.htm> [37] 12 October 2002.

Walker, Janice R. and Todd Taylor. *The Columbia Guide to Online Style*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

Weeks, Linton. "The No-Book Report: Skim It and Weep." *Washington Post* 14 May 2001. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-yn/articles/A2w3370-2001May> [38] 13.html. (15 May 2001).

Welch, Kathleen L. *Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1999.

Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. 25th anniversary ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2001.

Provenance:

Citation Format: Jeske, Jeff. "How Will We Write? A Report from the National College Media Convention." *The Writing Instructor*. 2004. <http://www.writinginstructor.com/essays/jeske.html> [39] (Date Accessed).

Review Process: Firstname Lastname's essay was accepted for publication following blind, peer review.

Site content (c) 2001 - 2009 by *The Writing Instructor*. Some TWI content is published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 License](#), where indicated. TWI is supported by [Purdue University](#) and [California State University, San Marcos](#). The site is hosted and published by the [Professional Writing Program](#) at Purdue.

Source URL: <http://writinginstructor.com/essays/jeske.html>

Links:

- [1] <mailto:jjeske@guilford.edu>
- [2] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note1>
- [3] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note2>
- [4] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note3>
- [5] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note4>
- [6] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note5>
- [7] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note6>
- [8] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note7>
- [9] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note8>
- [10] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note9>
- [11] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note10>
- [12] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note11>
- [13] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note12>
- [14] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note13>
- [15] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note14>
- [16] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note15>
- [17] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#note16>
- [18] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#1back>
- [19] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#2back>
- [20] <http://www.ibiblio.org/twtaylor/>
- [21] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#3back>
- [22] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#4back>
- [23] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#5back>
- [24] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#6back>
- [25] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#7back>
- [26] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#8back>
- [27] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#9back>
- [28] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#10back>
- [29] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#11back>
- [30] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#12back>
- [31] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#13back>
- [32] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#14back>
- [33] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#15back>
- [34] <http://writinginstructor.com/book/export/html/7#16back>
- [35] <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/>
- [36] <http://homepage.mac.com/alysson/httoc.html>
- [37] <http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/7.2/binder.html?sectionone/trupe/WiredWorld.htm>
- [38] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-yn/articles/A2w3370-2001May>
- [39] <http://www.writinginstructor.com/essays/jeske.html>